

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SAM-01 TRSE-00 EB-07 OMB-01 /068 W

----- 080221

P R 031748Z NOV 76

FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2970

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

SECDEF WASHDC

CINC USAFE RAMSTEIN

CINC USAREUR HEIDELBERG

CINC EUR VAIHINGEN

USNMR SHAPE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 18553

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, GW

SUBJECT: LEBER DISMISSES TWO AIR FORCE GENERALS

REF: BONN 17713 DTG 191912Z OCT 76

BEGIN SUMMARY: DEFENSE MINISTER LEBER HAS DISMISSED TWO

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HIGH-RANKING GERMAN AIR FORCE GENERALS BECAUSE OF THE

WAY IN WHICH THEY DEFENDED THE INVITATION EXTENDED TO A RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST (AND FORMER LUFTWAFFE ACE) TO PARTICIPATE IN AN AIR FORCE-SPONSORED REUNION OF FORMER DIVE-BOMBER PILOTS. THE GENERALS SUGGESTED THAT THE WAR ACE'S EXTREME RIGHT-WING VIEWS COULD HAVE BEEN "TEMPERED" JUST AS THE COMMUNIST VIEWS OF HERBERT WEHNER HAD BEEN "TEMPERED" TO THE POINT WHERE HE WAS NOW CHAIRMAN OF THE SPD PARTY ORGANIZATION IN THE BUNDESTAG. THE PRESS GAVE THE AFFAIR MAXIMUM PLAY AND BACKED LEBER'S ACTION. THE OPPOSITION PARTIES WERE MORE CRITICAL. MANY OBSERVERS CONSIDER THAT THE AFFAIR IS ANOTHER ATTEMPT BY LEFT-WING MEMBERS OF LEBER'S SPD PARTY TO DISCREDIT THE MINISTER AND DRIVE HIM FROM OFFICE. END SUMMARY.

1. OVER THE WEEKEND OF OCTOBER 30-31 MINISTER OF DEFENSE LEBER DISMISSED THE HEAD OF THE LUFTWAFFE'S TACTICAL AIR COMMAND (LT. GEN. WALTER KRUPINSKI) AND HIS DEPUTY (MAJOR GENERAL KARL-HEINZ FRANKEL). THEY WERE DISMISSED BECAUSE OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THE CONTROVERSY WHICH AROSE OVER THE INVITATION EXTENDED TO AN EX-COLONEL OF THE NAZI LUFTWAFFE, COL. HANS-ULRICH RUDEL, TO ATTEND A MEETING OF FORMER DIVE-BOMBER PILOTS HELD AT THE 51ST RECONNAISSANCE WING (THE "IMMELMANN" WING) AT BREMGARTEN THE WEEKEND PREVIOUSLY. RUDEL, WHO WAS THE MOST HIGHLY-DECORATED SOLDIER OF THE GERMAN WEHRMACHT DURING WORLD WAR TWO, WAS THE COMMANDER OF THE "IMMELMANN" DIVE-BOMBER WING AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II. THE CONTROVERSY DID NOT JUST ARISE FROM THE FACT THAT RUDEL HAD BECOME NOTORIOUS IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD AS A RIGHT-WING RADICAL ACTIVE IN SEVERAL RIGHT-WING POLITICAL PARTIES. IT STEMMED MORE FROM THE GENERALS' ATTEMPT TO DEFEND THE INVITATION BY EQUATING RUDEL'S RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST PAST WITH THE COMMUNIST PAST OF WEHNER.

2. THE FRG PRESS TREATED THE MATTER AS A MAJOR NEWS ITEM AND EDITORIAL TOPIC. MORE THAN FIFTY ARTICLES AND EDITORIALS ON THE SUBJECT APPEARED IN MAJOR GERMAN NEWSPAPERS. WITH ONE EXCEPTION (HERBERT KREMP OF THE CONFIDENTIAL

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RIGHT CENTER "DIE WELT"), THEY APPROVED OF LEBER'S ACTION IN DISMISSING THE GENERALS. THE CDU/CSU DEFENSE EXPERT MANFRED WOERNER WAS CRITICAL, CLAIMING LEBER HAD "GONE TOO FAR" IN THIS MATTER AND HAD ACTED "UNDER PRESSURE FROM THE SPD'S LEFT WING."

3. MOST OBSERVERS WOULD SAY THAT LEBER HAD NO ALTER-NATIVE. HOWEVER, THE GENERALS HAVE SOME JUSTIFIED

GRIEVANCES. THE EXTENDING OF THE INVITATION HAD BEEN APPROVED BY PARLIAMENTARY STATE SECRETARY SCHMIDT, A MEMBER OF THE BUNDESTAG WHOSE ACTION SHOULD HAVE PROTECTED THE GENERALS FROM POLITICAL CRITICISM. IN FACT, THE CRITICISM AROSE BECAUSE OF THE INJUDICIOUS DEFENSE WHICH THE GENERALS HAD GIVEN DURING A SUPPOSEDLY OFF-THE-RECORD PRESS BRIEFING. WHAT REALLY HAPPENED WAS THAT A NEWSPAPERMAN BETRAYED A CONFIDENCE.

4. THIS BETRAYAL OF CONFIDENCE HAS RENEWED SPECULATION THAT SOME OF LEBER'S LEFT-WING COLLEAGUES ARE WILLING TO GO TO GREAT LENGTHS TO DRIVE THE MINISTER

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 BONN 18553

FROM OFFICE. THOSE WHO HOLD THIS VIEW POINT TO A SERIES
OF ATTACKS LEVIED AGAINST LEBER:

(1) BECAUSE THE GERMAN ARMY INSPECTOR ATTENDED A MAY
1975 MADRID PARADE COMMEMORATING THE VICTORY OF FASCISM
IN SPAIN (BONN 8809 DTG 21730Z JUN 75); (2) BECAUSE A
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CHILEAN OFFICER WAS BEING TRAINED DURING 1975 AT THE
GERMAN ARMY'S LEADERSHIP SCHOOL (BONN 15397 DTG 191426Z
SEP 75); (3) BECAUSE AIR FORCE LIEUTENANT GENERAL RALL WAS
FORCED TO RESIGN LAST OCTOBER OVER HIS VISIT TO SOUTH
AFRICA (BONN 16286 DTG 31726Z OCT 75); AND (4) BECAUSE OF
THE RECENT RESIGNATION OF STATE SECRETARY DR. MANN
(BONN 17430 DTG 141911Z OCT 76). LEBER'S CRITICS WOULD
SAY THAT THESE INCIDENTS AS WELL AS THE KRUPINSKI/
FRANKE AFFAIR MERELY REFLECT LEBER'S INABILITY TO CONTROL
THE MILITARY.

5. WHATEVER MAY BE THE TRUTH OR FALSITY OF THE CON-
SPIRACY THEORY, IT IS TRUE THAT THE EXTREME LEFT-WING
OF THE SPD PARTY HAS NO LOVE FOR GEORG LEBER. HE WAS,
FOR EXAMPLE, EDGED OUT AS THE SPD'S DIRECT CANDIDATE
FOR THE BUNDESTAG FROM HIS OLD DISTRICT BY A LEFT-
WINGER. WHILE LEBER WAS REELECTED TO PARLIAMENT LAST
MONTH ON THE SPD PARTY LIST, THE LOSS OF HIS OWN SEAT
WAS A BLOW TO HIS POSITION IN THE PARTY. THE EMBASSY
BELIEVES THAT LEBER WILL CONTINUE AS DEFENSE MINISTER
FOR THE REASONS IT DETAILED IN REFTTEL. HOWEVER, THE
LATEST INCIDENT HAS NOT HELPED HIS PRESTIGE
INSIDE OR OUTSIDE THE PARTY.
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